

Chapter 4. USING SPECIAL TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION

D. TAKING INITIAL ACTION STEPS

In an era of many distractions and competing interests, agencies need more varied and effective ways to grab the public's attention and engage them meaningfully in planning activities. Here are some steps agencies can take to use special techniques:

1. **Evaluate whether special techniques are needed and why.**
Perform a self-evaluation of the agency's public involvement efforts to determine if a representative cross-section of the community is responding and being heard. Decide if special techniques are necessary to increase participation or meet a need not being addressed by standard methods. Keep in mind the overall strategy of the public involvement program.
2. **Determine which special techniques are appropriate.**
Define the specific purpose to be achieved. Explore the array of techniques available to determine which one fulfills that purpose for the intended audience. Assess the interest it might arouse. Seek the advice of participants who are already knowledgeable about agency proposals. Survey a sample of community people or hold a focus group to flesh out their reactions. If interactive technologies are being considered, assess whether the intended audience is likely to be put off or drawn in by them.
3. **Assure the necessary funding.**
Budget staff time, equipment, supplies, and other monetary costs—even the smallest events incur them. Determine if they can be met within existing budgets. For larger ventures where private funding assistance is needed, develop a cost proposal for potential sponsors, carefully explaining the event and projecting its anticipated benefits to the community at large.
4. **Evaluate the approach with community advisors.**
During early phases of planning a new venture, seek suggestions from community members or key people. As the date for starting a public involvement process draws near, solicit additional comments on the details of the approach. After a venture is launched and as a guide to future innovations, assess both its positive and negative impacts with community advisors.